Chapter 8: Safety and Security Issues

The coast defense fortifications within the boundaries of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area present challenges for the safety of park users and maintenance staff, while simultaneously suggesting the kinds of associated issues that necessarily arise from the needs of securing isolated government property. Maintained by the National Park Service, the sites of these fortifications primarily pose safety and security situations inherent in their existence as former military installations built to blend into coastal land forms at the entrance to a large and prominent bay. As such, their role as effective, but historically camouflaged, guardians is no different along the Pacific shore at San Francisco than along coastal terrain anywhere. Site peculiarities may vary from battery to battery, and states of sustained physical fabric may pose differing problems due to microclimatic conditions and the intrinsic ability of a structure to weather well or poorly over time. Ready access to a location today, or lack thereof, may also either alleviate or aggravate safety and security concerns, as may general cultural trends in urban and suburban San Francisco. The public may choose to participate in keeping its park attractive and viable, just as it may select locations to conduct activities ranging from picnicking and hiking, to garbage dumping and serious crime. National Park Service staff must balance perceived issues, staying alert to changes, and actively involving park constituents in the care, concern, and appreciation of the batteries—and their host sites—as irreplaceable windows into history.

Current park users seek a rural recreational experience effectively set within, and immediately near, a densely populated city. Visitors typically want to relax, to find respite from the regimen and stress of work schedules, long and sustained commutes, and just being inside too many hours at a time. More often than not, urban visitors are somewhat inattentive to the physical hazards posed by the batteries. They easily can be surprised while exploring a location, can wander away from prescribed trails and fencing, and can leave common sense at home. While accidents at unpopulated sites might be worsened by the lack of interpretive park staff at individual batteries, it is also reasonable to assume that a key need of the late twentieth century park visitor is focused on rural discovery unaccompanied by too many constraints. Again, park staff must balance user needs with staying alert to site conditions, and must themselves be aware of locational hazards while maintaining, preserving, and restoring the batteries.

At the Batteries

Safety

Batteries themselves are oversized and imposing structures. By virtue of what they are, they offer visitors and staff alike a heads up experience with an eye toward safety concerns. One is not likely to wander across a hillside or along a cliff and stumble into a submerged or completely overgrown battery—although precarious footholds and unseen structural features hidden by vegetation can be present at all sites and all trails should be clearly marked, on ground allowing firm footings. Once at a battery, safety issues focus on paying attention to smaller details. Types of safety concerns include deteriorated and missing segments of handrails; protruding metalwork; crumbled concrete; precarious drop-offs; steep and narrow stairs; puddled and slippery surfaces; uneven, sometimes separated, floorings and gun mount areas; sloped battery blast aprons unintended for climbing; splintering doors; peeling paint accumulated to toxicity with standing moisture; obscuring, entangling, or poisonous vegetation; and, general debris (Plate 48).

For example, at Battery Crosby, a large fragment of stairway has spalled away, leaving a far more narrow passage than a visitor might be assumed to expect. Midway up the stair to the crows nest on the right flank of Battery Marcus Miller, emplacement three, a riser has dropped dramatically, and would not be easily noticed by someone descending the stairs. Plant growth substantially hides the stairs at the Stotsenburg-McKinnon site. Tripping hazards due to uneven settlement are exemplified in the subsidence

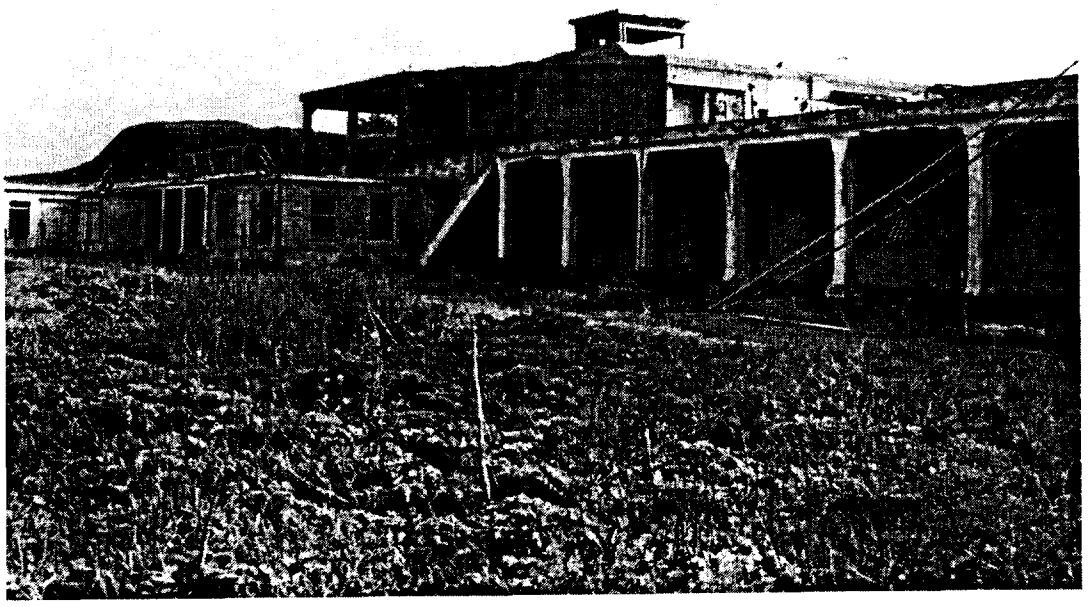

Plate 48. Battery Mendell, Fort Barry, constructed 1900-1902. View of 1973. Courtesy of the Park Archives of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

of the blast apron from the main concrete mass at Battery Mendell (Plate 49). And almost every structure contains an unprotected drop, sometimes of great height as at Batteries Dynamite and Duncan. While high parapet walls exist at most gun batteries of the Endicott and Taft periods, these walls and their definitive heights are fundamental to historic structural character, and are an inseparable aspect of the batteries' nature in the same way that precipitous rocky outcroppings are what we expect to see in the mountains. The pervasive concern over handrails effectively weights safety against the compromise of essential resource character, and must be most judiciously reviewed before taking action.

Security

Security issues at the batteries, on the other hand, demand an opposite, more encompassing perspective than one honed pre-emptively to detail. Fencing for sites with major (or multiple) safety concerns; for fragile earthworks locations in an unrestored condition; and, for batteries that have become the focus of undesirable activities (such as gang exchanges, drug sales and use, and competitive graffiti murals), might be warranted, but necessitates maintenance and vigilant site review. Fences at most battery locations, such as at Cavallo Battery, can be penetrated with little effort—due to the isolation of the sites, to the desire to keep the location relatively open for viewing, and to attempts at lessening impacts on the general viewshed. Fencing itself can create secondary safety and liability issues once cut into or pushed over, or if mangled or rusted.

Within a fenced battery site, or at an open-access location, security frequently is often further achieved through temporary (or non-permanent) closure of the structure from the outside in. Closures at the batteries of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area were observed as most effective where they were recent, such as the steel plates welded over the opening at Batteries Spencer and Godfrey, or, where staff has maintained historical closures, such as at Battery Wallace. Welding the hasp bar found on the typical

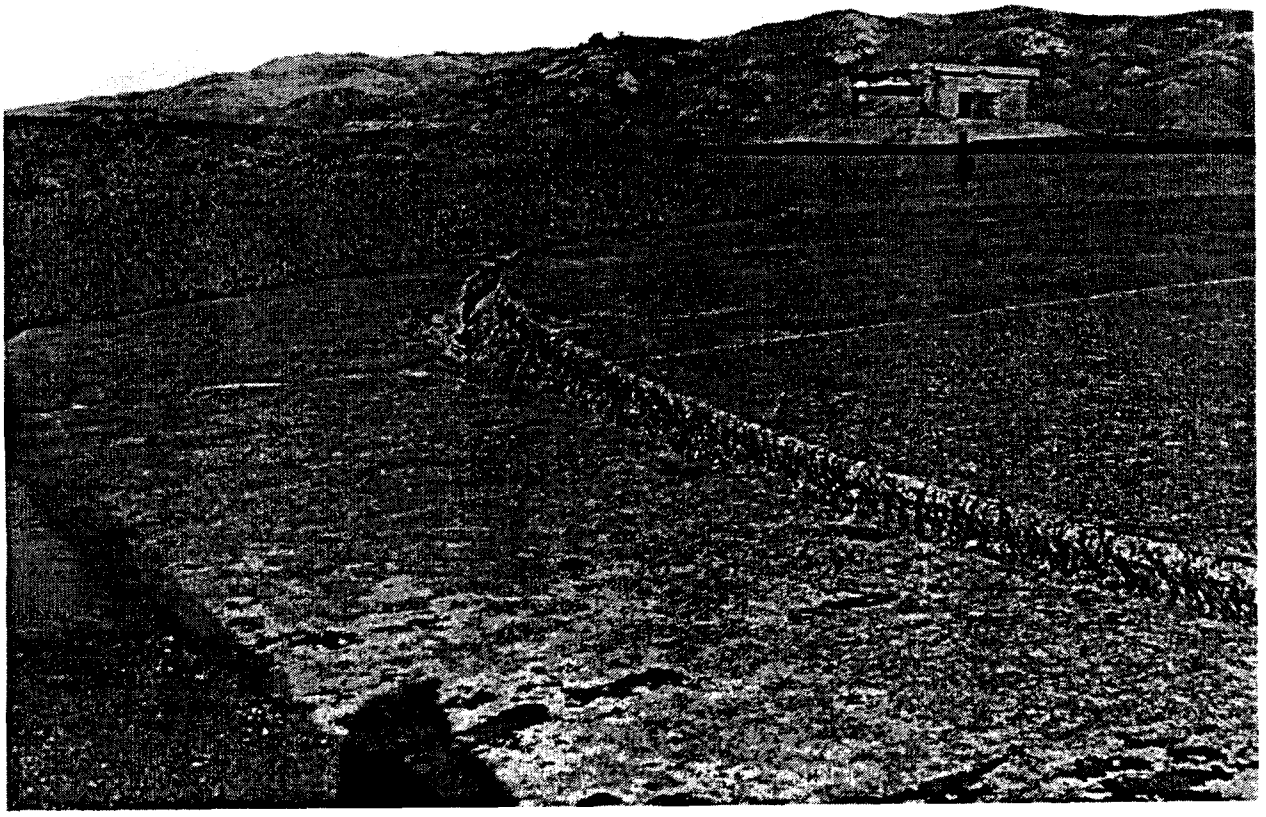

Plate 49. Battery Mendell. Looking North to BC station from front of emplacement two, showing separation and subsidence of blast apron from concrete mass.

wooden single- and double-leaf doors most often has brought about an ineffective closure that has additionally damaged the fabric of the resource itself. Similarly, welding the unique door and window covers at Battery Dynamite in a partially open position has prevented the use or rehabilitation of the mechanical closures built into those features. Sealing of original openings for security purposes should also always be coordinated with ventilation of interior spaces. Although overall ventilation should be considered, each closure panel should have integral top and bottom vents, screened for security. Both site-enclosing fencing and immediate closure for battery apertures are sometimes demanded to achieve security, but both ask for future creative thought to remain as sensitive as is reasonable and to allow an accurate historic site interpretation.

Awareness of Ancillary Structures

Safety

Original design engineering and placement on site, aggravated by ground settlement and growth of vegetation over time, create special safety issues for the myriad of ancillary structures built to accompany coastal defense fortifications. Beginning in the 1890s, the Army constructed both mine casemates and fire command stations to improve the technologies of defense and its controlled accuracy. Men stationed in the bombproof rooms of the casemates operated the switchboards that sent electric signals to explode underwater mines in the bay. Concrete mine casemates were engineered into, and under, ground areas, with steep passageways, poorly lit descending stairs, inclined cable galleries, and thick, pipe-ventilated, earthen overcover. Siting included steep and rocky bluffs, as well as locations re-engineered through

excavation and fill. Today mine casemates are among the most dangerous of all coast defense structures due to their obscured locations and remnants of unprotected original construction features, such as deep cableways remaining in flooring. MC-1 at Fort Barry contains two large and uncovered openings at the end of the entry gallery: it is dark at the end of the passage, and an unwary visitor or staff member without a flashlight could easily fall into the openings. The switchboard room immediately adjacent now has no floor at all, posing a definite hazard to those who try to enter the building (Plate 50).

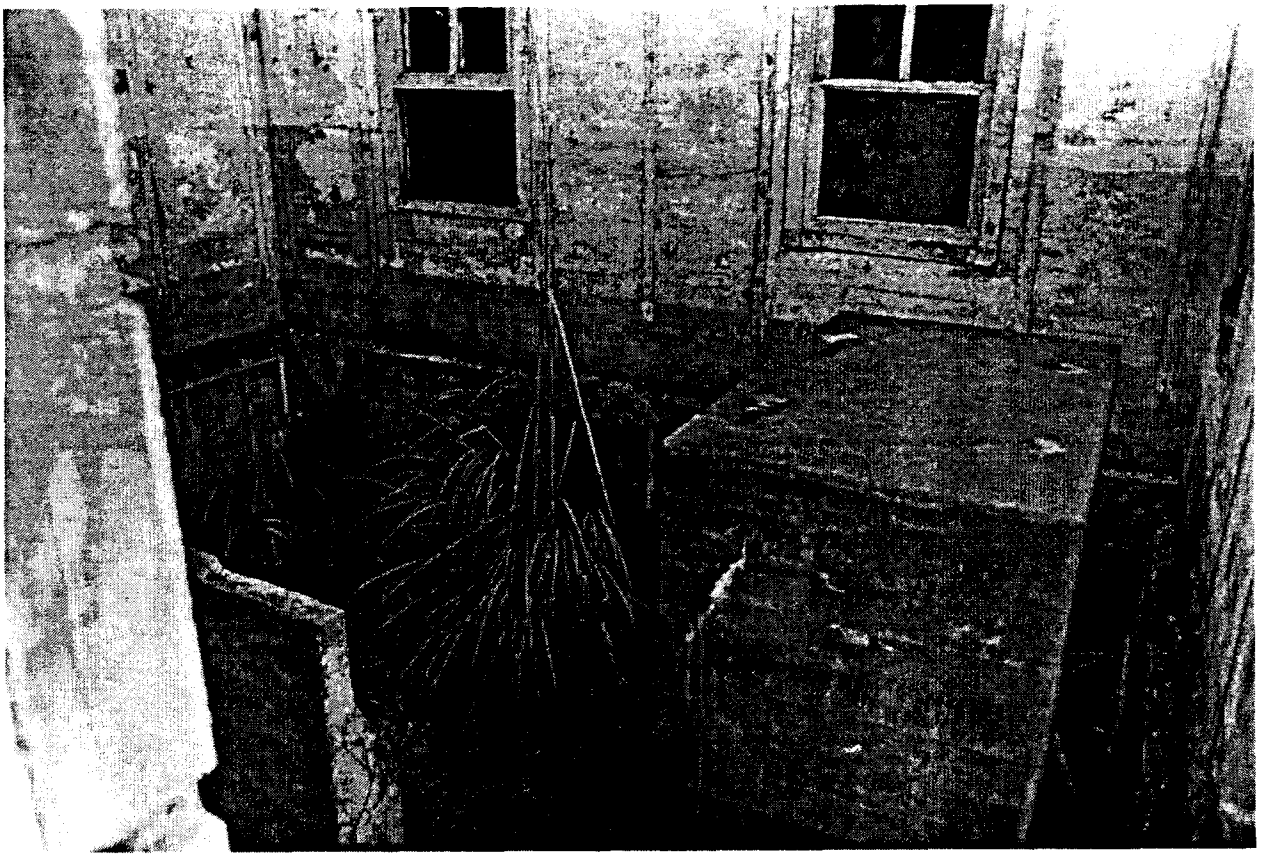

Plate 50. Absence of flooring, at the entrance to the switchboard room, mine casemate, Fort Barry.

Systems of fire command and control stations pose similar problems to those of mine casemates through their buried design and engineering, often with only roofs and observation slits protruding above the soil line. Their multiplicity, coupled with their abandonment, long periods of disuse, and their more-active deterioration as a byproduct of their direct exposure to ground water retention, add to the challenges the structures will continue to present. Fire control stations, including those for battery commanders (BC stations) as well as observation stations, offer relative unpredictability for visitors who are not knowledgeable about the history of how systems for controlling the fire of modern weapons evolved. Those from the 1930s and 1940s were often elaborately camouflaged to blend into the land forms that hosted them. Steep sites, typically with the surrounding ground uneven or abruptly dropping away, contribute to these features, but sometimes have fared badly through land mass subsidence—quite literally in the case of B^1S^1 for Battery Construction #129 on Wolf Ridge within Fort Cronkhite, a structure beginning to slide into the Pacific Ocean below (Plate 51). A detailed inventory of coast defense ancillary structures is warranted, with maintenance concerns called out as a first step toward a safety plan.

Security

Security issues for ancillary structures are perhaps less problematic than those found at the main batteries. Most of these structures are too small to become major gathering places. They offer little shelter for unwanted activities, although they could become attractive for graffiti artists. For maintaining park resource security, a comprehensive inventory with mapping should allow staff to highlight any structures warranting careful and repeated observation.

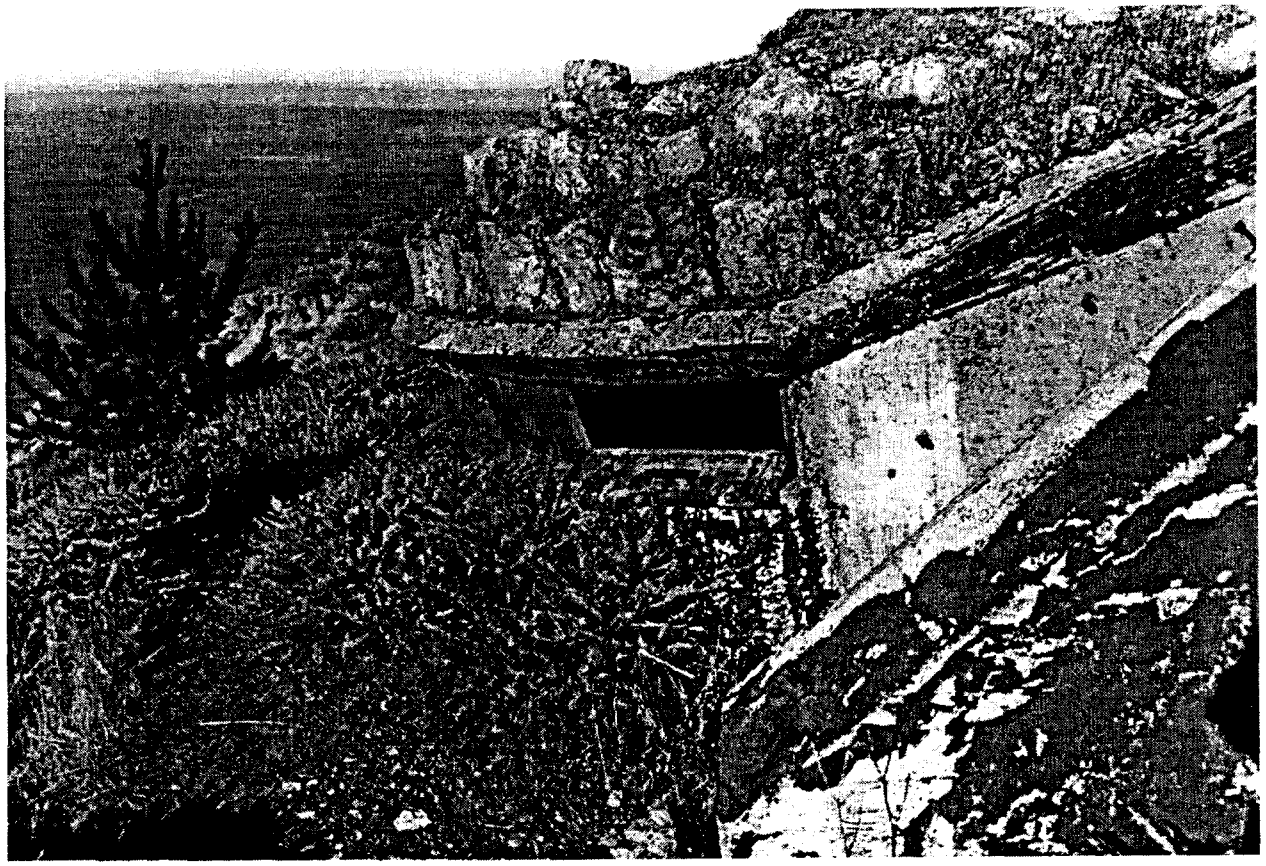

Plate 51. B[1]S[1] for Battery Construction #129, Fort Cronkhite. Detail of roof camouflage and observation slit shutters. Subsidence at site.

Standard Operating Procedures for Law Enforcement Actions

Abandoned fortification structures are sometimes the sites of full-fledged law enforcement incidents. These illegal activities may include vandalism, graffiti, destruction or theft of government property, breaking and entering, unauthorized camping by vagrants, and rowdy behavior such as drinking, drug use or gang-related activities. In some locations, fortifications structures have been the scenes of satanic rituals, assaults, suicides, and even murders.

Whenever park staff encounter any type of illegal activity they should immediately notify law enforcement personnel. In the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the United States Park Police carry out this responsibility. Untrained staff should never enter any building that is discovered unsecured until the area is thoroughly searched by peace officers. Personal safety of the park staff and visitors should always be of primary concern.

Once an area is secure, law enforcement staff should file the appropriate incident reports describing the nature of the event and any resulting damages or costs. These reports and any subsequent criminal investigations should describe the affected fortifications by name and building number, clearly noting that these resources are *historic structures*. Special mention should be made of any impacted resources over 100 years of age since these structures may be covered by the Archeological Resource Resource Protection Act (ARPA). ARPA violations may be prosecuted as felony offenses instead of as misdemeanors.

Concurrent with law enforcement reports, work orders should be submitted to repair or clean up the fortifications. Preparation of these work orders, or the delegation of their preparation, should be the responsibility of the reporting party. Critical elements to include in these work orders are (a) securing any doors or windows that have been forced open; (b) removal of debris such as beverage containers, litter or (in some cases) drug paraphernalia; (c) appropriate treatments for any site hazards known—or assumed—to be toxic or poisonous; and, (d) removal or painting out of graffiti.

Re-securing of the fortifications and graffiti treatment should follow established procedures detailed in chapter 10. The reasons for taking these immediate actions are

(1) to prevent further damage to the resource that might result from leaving it unsecured;
(2) to remove safety hazards;
(3) to deny access to parts of the structures where illegal activities might occur;
(4) to remove visible signs of criminal activity that, if allowed to remain, might encourage similar behavior; and
(5) to maintain a cared-for appearance around the fortifications.

All staff actions should strive to achieve safe and secure locations within the boundaries of a large, public park, understanding its immediate access to individuals living in, or visiting, the urban setting of San Francisco.